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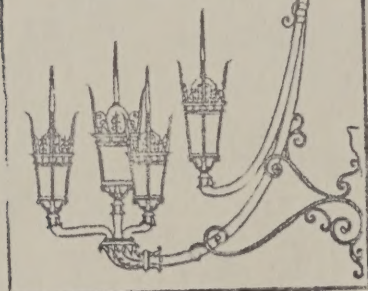
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A REVIEW OF PLANNING IN THE BRA

A Review of Current Planning Work Programs, Major Issues,  
Priorities for Future Undertakings, and Recommendations for  
Reorganizing BRA's Planning Functions.

Boston Redevelopment Authority  
Planning Committee  
October, 1976



A REVIEW OF PLANNING IN THE BRA  
PLANNING COMMITTEE  
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I. INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this paper are: (1) to summarize recent discussions which have been held by the BRA Planning Committee; (2) to bring into focus several issues which have been raised and to recommend some planning tasks which should become priorities for the BRA; and (3) to recommend a Planning organizational structure flowing from these shifting priorities.

During the past few months, there has been much discussion of BRA's planning efforts, particularly during the staff seminars which were held earlier this year. While many good suggestions emerged from the seminar sessions for BRA's Planning program, it was clear that there is considerable diversity of opinion surrounding BRA's Planning efforts, which is not unexpected, given the wide diversity of professional interests that exist within the BRA. Nevertheless, the sessions were useful in getting these interests and opinions on the table.

As an outgrowth of the Seminars, a BRA Planning Committee was formed in July and charged by Mr. Kenney with the task of preparing work programs representing BRA's current Planning efforts, suggesting new priority tasks which should be undertaken, and, generally coordinating and communicating all of BRA's Planning programs.

In terms of the charge given to the Planning Committee, Planning has been defined in its broadest sense; and hence, the Committee is composed of BRA Department Directors responsible for Planning, Research, Transportation, Urban Design, Community Development, Federal Aid,







Downtown Planning, Neighborhood Planning and Historic Preservation. Over the past two months, the Committee has prepared detailed work programs representing current Departmental workloads, has discussed suggestions for new planning efforts which should be undertaken and has reviewed goals which should be set forth for BRA's overall Planning Program.





## II. CURRENT BRA PLANNING WORK PROGRAM

The combined BRA Planning Work Program Outline is long and complex, but is revealing in illustrating the variety of planning efforts now underway. Less than eight years ago, the entire professional staff of BRA was assigned to one or another aspect of the City's Urban Renewal Program. Professional staff today is pursuing a multi-faceted planning program ranging from sophisticated analyses of the City's economic potentials and the roles of public and private financing in economic growth -- to city-wide and neighborhood concern for historic preservation -- to preparing program proposals for Boston's neighborhoods.

### A. Research

Significant planning efforts are underway in the Research Department to continue the analysis and projection of Boston's economy and its future potential, as well as some comparative analyses of Boston's economic situation with those of other large cities in the nation. Priority attention is being placed in developing systems for analyzing quickly and accurately the role of public investment in major new development proposals. In addition, cost-benefit analyses, cash flows, and economic impacts of major new development projects are being





prepared for several priority projects. Research Department staff is contributing heavily to BRA's housing planning programs including the Multi-Family Investor Owned Housing Study, Neighborhood Housing Improvement programs, and is beginning a major effort to analyze the impact of alternative tax policies upon residential housing market trends.

Just as important as these individual City-wide planning efforts carried out by the Research Department is the fact that the Department acts in a service capacity supplying other BRA Departments and the City with centralized data and analysis concerning Boston, the characteristics of its population, labor force and its neighborhoods

B. District Planning

From a totally different perspective, BRA's District Planning staff is engaged in carrying out planning work programs for Boston's neighborhoods in close cooperation with neighborhood groups, Little City Halls, and City Departments.

As technical input into the City's Community Development and Capital Improvement Programs, a current high priority work item involves the preparation of Neighborhood Profiles. These profiles analyze critical needs of each of the City's neighborhoods for Capital Improvements and programs carried out under CD.

A priority concern for neighborhood revitalization is reflected in District Planning work programs relating to studies of investor-owned multi-family housing, a review and evaluation of the City's Housing Improvement Program, and detailed programs developed for neighborhood Commercial area improvements.





Finally, and too numerous to outline specifically, is the continuing technical assistance provided by the District Planning staff to community groups and to other City Departments.

C. Transportation Planning

The work program for BRA's Transportation Planning staff can be summarized in three categories: participation in inter-agency transportation matters, ongoing review and design of transportation improvements throughout the City, and specific new transportation planning project proposals.

Included in the first category of inter-agency transportation matters, the transportation staff is heavily involved with the Joint Regional Transportation Committee and its Central Transportation Planning Staff in identifying and programming improvements through the Executive Office of Transportation and Construction, MBTA and the Massachusetts DPW.

In terms of new transportation planning projects, the transportation planning staff have identified priority undertakings including the Charlestown Water-Chelsea Street Connector, the New South Boston Seaport Access Roadway, transportation issues relating to the South Station and Lafayette Place projects, as well as the proposals for the Auto-Restricted Zone along Summer Street in Downtown Boston.

D. Historic Preservation

The work program for BRA's Historic Preservation staff focuses upon several aspects of Historic Preservation in the City. Of priority importance is the technical assistance to and administration of the





newly established Boston Landmarks Commission. An additional high priority work program item is the preparation of the New Neighborhoods Downtown Study funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. In cooperation with other BRA planning staff, this study will examine the potential market for and feasibility of residential conversion opportunities within the Downtown area.

Another aspect of the Preservation staff's work program involves the securing of preservation funds for specific eligible structures through the City via the State Office of Historic Preservation, as well as the continuing preparation of submissions to the National Register for protective designation.

#### E. Environmental Review

Many of BRA's project planning activities, as well as those of the City, require preparation of Environmental Clearances, Impact Statements and Environmental Assessments. Those for the BRA and many of those for the City's CDBG Programs are carried out by BRA's Environmental Review Staff. In addition, the staff reviews and comments on environmental assessments and impact reports which are submitted to the Authority for projects requiring BRA approval, as well as those which are submitted to the BRA by the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs for comment. Priority environmental reviews being carried out currently include the preparation of CDBG Clearance for 1976 Entitlement Projects, Environmental Clearances for Project Closeout and Urgent Needs Funding, and special Environmental Studies for projects such as Charlestown Naval Shipyard.



F. Community Development

The work program for the Community Development Department focuses upon planning and implementation efforts in BRA's Urban Renewal Projects. With many projects nearing final closeout, the work program reflects priorities placed on completion of the public works programs, completion of remaining property dispositions and, in selected cases, examining reuse alternatives for some disposition parcels.

A major new undertaking for the Community Development staff is the Charlestown Naval Shipyard project.

The above descriptions of Departmental work programs is brief and does not touch upon many individual planning work items being undertaken. Nevertheless, the diversity of BRA planning is obvious. It is evident that the BRA's total planning program is pursued at levels ranging from the Nation to Region to State to Metro-Region to City-wide to the neighborhood and sub-neighborhood.





### III. PLANNING ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout the Planning Committee's discussions of the Work Program, numerous issues have been raised concerning priorities, goals, duplication or overlap of staff work, accountability, and staff organization among many. While there is no clear consensus on the means for resolving these issues, it is useful to outline several of the issues and some of the recommended means.

#### A. Functional Planning

Just as BRA's Planning function has ceased to focus upon the Urban Renewal Program as such, we should begin to encourage a shift from our present heavy "geographic" focus to a focus which is centered around building better "technical support systems" on a functional planning basis, with additional initiative capabilities. Obvious examples of areas where we should begin include functional planning and technical support for (a) housing policy planning and housing programming; (b) medical and educational institutional growth planning; and (c) employment, job creation and related economic development planning.

#### B. Housing

BRA's Housing Planning efforts are scattered among three departments and little coordination is evident. The importance of housing improvement to neighborhood revitalization, and the importance of achieving targets which have been identified for new housing units (particularly in the Downtown area) warrant centralization of all housing planning and programming efforts within one area of the Authority with one individual accountable.





C. Priorities

As mentioned previously, the BRA Planning Work Program contains a wide variety of important work being carried out by the staff. However, there is little indication of what the Departmental priorities are. In order to better focus staff work on specific items, priorities should be identified for concentration over the next 12 months.

D. District Planning

The focus of the District Planning staff should be re-directed from the predominantly day-to-day to a focus which has a broader and longer-range objective. The direction of BRA's District Planning staff has changed over the past eight years. However, with the building of capacities elsewhere in the City to handle day-to-day matters, an opportunity exists for staff to expand its concerns to issues which have longer-range significance. The present staff has excellent capabilities for providing technical back-up to other City Departments as needed and should continue to do so. However, it is not productive to continue to dwell upon immediate issues which are clearly the responsibility of others or upon issues where BRA District Planning efforts will not be productive or useful to those responsible for production.

E. City-wide Planning

The Planning Work Programs appear to indicate that there is a very large void in our current planning efforts. In the extreme, it is useful to have built staff capacities capable of "identifying ten-year targets for economic growth by capitalizing upon growth prospects in key sectors of Boston's changing economic situation"-----and, to have built staff capacities capable of "identifying what type of



street tree should be planted on what street this fall". In this, many questions are left unanswered such as: are the ten-year targets realistic; and, if so, how are they to be achieved, and at what cost to whom over what period of time? Where will they be achieved, and what is their impact upon neighborhood improvement programs, and how does that relate to the street tree?

In other words, there is much that BRA's Research Department and BRA's District Planners have to offer each other in the interest of zeroing in on more usable mid-range planning goals, products, and projects for consideration by those responsible for carrying them out. In terms of being relevant to the City's decision makers, BRA Research and BRA District Planning have the same problem, but at opposite extremes. Better communication, better coordination of work programs, agreement on some very basic mid-range planning goals, and concurrence on planning gaps which should be filled would improve this situation.

#### F. General Plan

Eleven years has passed since Boston published its "General Plan - 1965-1975". Now in 1976, with the previous General Plan having expired, Boston has no stated "plan" for its future growth and development. Given the wealth of information, data, policies, growth targets, and strategies for neighborhood improvement that exists within the BRA and the City, it would seem appropriate and timely that BRA assume the responsibility of preparing a major new "General Plan" for the City. Many Federal





funding programs continue to insist that proposals to be carried out be consistent with the municipality's adopted Comprehensive Plan. In fact, Boston has none.

G. Economic Development

BRA efforts in Economic Development Planning could and should be intensified. The Economic base of the City is known, and areas in which economic growth can occur have been identified. We also know about growth opportunities of key sectors of the economy that can provide employment and taxes for the City and economic stimuli for neighborhood improvement. BRA's Economic Planning efforts should be expanded to policy and program formulation related to economic growth targets which have been identified. Mechanisms to achieve economic growth should be explored including financing mechanisms to assist business improvement, investment tax credits, job creation tax credits, and public investments which encourage private economic development among many. The mismatch between job potentials and Boston job skills and Boston job needs is known. No efforts are underway to integrate manpower planning with overall economic growth planning.

H. Longer-Range Planning

The Boston Redevelopment Authority should expand its capabilities to undertake priority assignments pertaining to longer-range planning and development. There is sufficient interest among staff and we have adequate staff resources now to begin. The initial core staff task force could be small, but will be flexible to change or expand over time, depending upon work load and the priorities which are established.





The group would undertake longer-range City-wide planning tasks. These tasks fit as a bridge between the Research Department and the District Planning staff and primary areas of concern would include:

- city-wide planning -- building upon Research Department work, develop and update a city-wide Profile Plan showing City problems and resources as a basis against which to evaluate shorter range plans, policies and projects.
- functional planning for special areas.
- policies for BRA and City on issues involving regional and state agencies.
- provide longer-term perspective for District Planners and serve as link between Research and District Planners.

A study outline for a Port of Boston-Waterfront Planning Study was prepared a couple of months ago. There is growing concern that this longer-range planning effort is important for several reasons.

First, MassPort has indicated that planning for the future Port of Boston will be their highest priority.

Second, although no action is anticipated this year on the Boulger Bill before the Legislature, it may be pushed for passage next year. If so, we need a much better handle on City policies concerning the future of the Port, future land uses for obsolete waterfront property, and appropriate new policies on land use, zoning and new development strategies.



Third, the Governor's Task Force on Coastal Resources (and the Coastal Zone Management staff) is beginning to come up with some specific proposals, some of which will affect Boston. Both BRA and the City formally requested that we be involved in this planning program at the outset. Neither is involved, but should be.

Together with the Planning Committee, the staff could begin now to establish priorities for future undertakings, develop long-range planning program outlines, time schedules, and staffing requirements.

#### H. Longer-Range Project Planning

In addition to an expanded capability in longer range planning, special project teams should be set up to undertake longer-range project planning tasks. There are numerous examples of potential development projects which emerge briefly from time to time, but are never brought to a point where a decision can be made on the prospects for their implementation. A concerted staff effort could result in identifying a program, a plan, an analysis of its costs and benefits, and an implementation strategy including potential public and private financing, funding sources, community interest and support, and impact over time on the City's finances. In many respects, the Charlestown project has been an example of this. Others can be carried out more quickly, in order to bring project ideas to the development and implementation stage, or to bring them to the point where they can be rejected as unmarketable, uneconomic, or untimely in terms of the City's ability to finance them. Right now, we spend too much time studying them over and over again without ever making a decision one way or another.





The Research staff is beginning some comparative cost-benefit analyses for several planned and potential new development projects. They are among 18 or so development projects which are appropriate for such detailed analyses. At the same time, District Planners have a selection of potential development projects which need to be pursued in a more aggressive manner than we have in the past. Priorities for the special project teams should be established and should include the following:

1. We are beginning major efforts to prepare proposals and an Environmental Impact Statement for the South Boston Seaport Access Road. In conjunction with this, we could well take a hard planning look at this important and neglected part of the City, including the area east of Fort Point Channel, Piers 1, 2 and 3, Commonwealth Pier, Fish Pier, vacant industrial and rail properties, and the South Boston Naval Annex.

2. East Boston Piers 1-4 and NDP II are other examples of where we have done some project planning work, but not enough to bring it to a real decision stage. It is unlikely that MassPort will ever do any thing with Piers 1-4. In terms of MassPort's desire to make decisions on just what land they will relinquish to others for non-MassPort purposes, Piers 1-4 stand a good chance of being controlled by someone other than MassPort in years to come. While complicated and controversial, this waterfront area of East Boston would be a challenging project planning undertaking for the City's Planning Agency and for the East Boston community.



Other examples of priority longer-range project planning efforts could include the Southwest Corridor, North Station, Columbia Point and numerous examples of smaller development and revitalization programs in Boston's neighborhoods.





#### IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR REORGANIZING THE BRA'S PLANNING FUNCTION

At the present time, BRA supports a "planning" staff of some 75 employees. There is an impressive diversity of talent that is represented by this staff, and its capability for productivity is obvious in the work programs being pursued and the products which emerge.

However, with some organizational changes, (1) productivity would be expanded through better and closer coordination of work programs and identification of priorities, (2) some segments of BRA's "Planning" efforts would be redirected immediately, and (3) BRA would formally establish one central planning/technical services function -- instead of maintaining seven or eight.

The following specific organizational adjustments are recommended:

1. A BRA Planning Committee should be formalized and a Chairman of that Committee designated as accountable for its decisions. The Planning Committee will be responsible for all central planning services, management, administration, policy formulation, coordination, work programs and staff assignments for the planning arm of the BRA. In addition, the Committee and its Chairman will be accountable for all personnel adjustments and budget for BRA's total "planning" effort.
2. The total staff of some 75 planning personnel should be organized to reflect a "pool" of professional talent capable of responding to demands placed upon the BRA and responsible to their immediate supervisor, who, in turn, would be accountable to the Planning Committee.



3. In terms of functions which should be performed by the Authority, this staff should be reorganized as follows and be responsible for the following technical functions:

a. Planning Committee

Chairman  
Staff Directors

Central Planning, Management, Administration,  
Policy, Coordination  
Work Programs, Staff Assignments  
Personnel and Budget

b. Research

economic and fiscal planning  
public and private investment strategy  
central data  
economic impact analyses  
city-wide strategies for housing, employment, economic  
development, etc.  
tax policy analysis  
city-wide and neighborhood, metropolitan and national  
demographic and economic analyses  
research services for BRA and City

c. Long-range Planning

housing policy and program development  
institutional policy and program development  
economic development planning and programming  
city-wide comprehensive planning  
Port of Boston and Harbor

d. Community Planning

mid-range neighborhood planning  
neighborhood analyses, needs, goals, program alternatives  
technical planning services to BRA and City

e. Historic Preservation

administration and technical assistance to BLC  
special preservation studies  
national register submissions, BLC designations  
preservation funding  
technical assistance to BRA and City





f. Transportation

inter-agency transportation planning  
as support to the Mayor's Office  
design and review of transportation improvements  
transportation planning project proposals  
transportation planning services to BRA and City

g. Zoning

administration and staff to Board of Appeal and Zoning  
Commission  
administration and staff to Back Bay Architectural  
Commission  
special zoning studies  
amendment and text changes for Zoning Code and Maps

h. Design

design review  
project design  
landscape design  
urban design

i. Environmental Review

environmental clearances, impact statements,  
assessments, and reviews  
CDBG clearances  
Environmental clearances/Project Closeouts and Urgent Needs

4. In addition to these groups of technical staff, the Planning Committee would direct the efforts of a new section of staff responsible for carrying out special projects. These assignments typically call for a team of people from various disciplines and, in each case, would be headed by a "team captain". Examples of efforts which would be undertaken by such teams include the Downtown Plan, Boston's Local Growth Policy, Special Project Planning activities, Project Financial Analyses, Program Development, etc.



5. In achieving this organizational structure, the "Planning Department", as presently constituted, would be eliminated, as would be the District Planning Department, as presently conceived. Further, the "Departmental" status of all remaining existing "Planning" departments would be superseded by the Planning Committee and its chairman.
6. With the responsibilities of Community Planners redefined, and redirected, approximately one-half of the present staff would be assigned to either the recommended Long-Range Planning (city-wide) pool of staff, or to the recommended Special Projects (task force) staff as appropriate, or to special functional planning efforts. The remaining Community Planners would be reassigned to cover larger geographic areas of the City and provide major technical input into longer-term planning undertakings from a community viewpoint.
7. Similarly, there are some research and transportation staff that would be reassigned to fill priority positions within the reorganized planning structure. In addition, all staff presently engaged in "housing planning" would be reassigned to either special task forces, specific housing issues, or to the Long-Range (city-wide) pool of staff.

The chart on the following page summarizes the Planning Organizational Proposal and indicates primary lines of responsibility and communication.





ORGANIZATION CHART  
B R A P L A N N I N G F U N C T I O N

